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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004426

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: IRAQI PRESIDENT RECOMMENDS U.S. DIALOGUE WITH
IRAN, IF IRANIANS CURB MILITIAS

REF: BAGHDAD 04402

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: President Jalal Talabani informed the Ambassador December 1 that Iranian leaders were eager to re-establish a direct dialogue with the U.S. on Iraq, during his November 27-29 trip to Iran. Talabani recommended that the U.S. talk to Iran if Iran follows through on a commitment to him to curb Jaysh al Mahdi (JAM) militia activity in coming weeks. Talabani gave the Iranians a list of measures -- to which the Iranians said they agreed -- for reducing violence and strengthening the Iraqi government (septel). In Talabani's view, the Iranians fear an alliance of Sunni Arab states, Turkey, and Afghanistan against Iran. There was no discussion of nuclear issues. Turning to internal politics, Talabani said he would urge moderate parties to move forward on plans for creating a new political front (ref). End Summary.

Talabani Provides List of Steps -- Iranians Claim They'll
Help Iraq

¶2. (S) President Talabani initiated the readout of his trip to Iran by telling the Ambassador that he had been frank and direct with the Iranians. He had underscored to them that the success of PM Maliki's government, as well the continued MNF-I presence, were of central importance to Iran. He said he gave the Iranians a list -- which he handed the Ambassador -- of steps they could take to restore Iraqi stability and bring down violence. These steps included curbing support for the JAM and other militias; compelling Syria to end support for Ba'athists and terror groups in Iraq; exchanging security information; and supporting Iraq diplomatically and politically. The Iranians stated they agreed with all the steps and wanted to sign the document, but Talabani told them he did not have authority to sign at that point. As such, he was treating the document as informal but binding. Talabani claimed to have given the document only to the Iranians and the Ambassador. He planned to share it with PM Maliki when they met later that day and with Massoud Barzani.

¶3. (S) Talabani said that he repeatedly asked the Iranians -- including President Ahmadinejad -- why Iran continued to carry out activities against Iraq when supporting Iraq was so clearly in Iran's strategic interest. While many in the Arab world blamed the U.S. for Iraq's instability, Talabani said he told Iranian leaders that they were primarily to blame, through their support of Syria on one side and the JAM on the other side. He cautioned them that a precipitous U.S. military departure from Iraq would leave a security void that Syria and other Arab States would try to fill, perhaps with another Saddam-style Sunni government pressing up against Iran's border. Iran should help build the Iraqi security

forces, rather than support those elements that kill Iraqi and American soldiers.

Iranians Eager for Dialogue; Should Deliver on JAM First

¶4. (S) According to Talabani, in all his meetings the Iranians emphasized a strong interest in improving relations and establishing a direct dialogue with the U.S. The Ambassador asked what type of dialogue the Iranians wanted, simply on Iraq or on the broader Middle East? Talabani believed they would be open to any discussion. Talabani advised them to deliver this message through the Swiss channel, although he said they clearly viewed him as an important messenger. The Ambassador asked if the U.S. should pursue a dialogue now. Talabani advised the U.S. to wait a few weeks -- he wanted to see if the Iranians follow through on their commitment to curb the JAM. The Iranians would also be sending a delegation headed by Quds force commander Qasim Suleimani to Damascus in coming days, and Talabani similarly hoped to see at least some Iranian efforts there. If the Iranians were serious in being tough on the Syrians, he opined, Iraq could defeat the AQIZ in less than a month.

¶5. (S) In Talabani's view, former Iranian president Rafsanjani was the key figure calling for improved relations with the U.S. During their meeting, the latter recalled Iranian cooperation with the U.S. in Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Rafsanjani asserted that he had "always believed in the importance of normalizing relations with the U.S." The only negative voice with regard to the relations with the U.S. was Supreme National Security Council Secretary Larajani, who softened his tone by their second meeting,

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perhaps after receiving word from others in the senior leadership that he had been speaking off cue.

Fears of an Arab-Turkish-Afghan Alliance

¶6. (S) Talabani said the Iranians fear a potential uniting of Sunni Arab countries, Turkey, and Afghanistan against Iran. They noted to him a recently canceled meeting of Sunni leaders planned in Turkey, as well as Saudi statements about arming the insurgency if U.S. troops leave. Supreme Leader Khomeini blamed Iraq's problems primarily on the Arab countries, which he said supported terrorists and did not want to see a Shi'a led government succeed. Talabani stated he asked Khomeini why, then, was Iran still supporting groups that kill Iraqi and U.S. soldiers who are fighting these terrorists? Talabani said he received no answer.

¶7. (S) Talabani reported no discussion of the nuclear issue during his visit. The Iranians offered to sell Iraq arms, including heavy weapons. The Iranians did not oppose the upcoming visit to the U.S. of SCIRI party leader Abdul Aziz al-Hakim or PM Maliki's meeting with President Bush in Iran. They believed, however, that Maliki needed to be stronger and more active. Talabani reiterated to them that Iran should therefore do everything possible to support the PM.

Talabani Support for New Front

¶8. (S) Turning to domestic politics, the Ambassador stated that before Talabani's trip to Iran, Kurdish Regional Government President Marsoud Barzani and other leaders had begun efforts to unite Iraq's moderate parties in a new political front in support of Maliki (ref). The PM had been briefed and was happy to hear of the proposal. Talabani said he would urge the parties to move forward quickly and would discuss the issue with the PM.

